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CANDID INQUIRY

INTO SOME POINTS OF

PUBLIC RELIGION;

OR,

*K Enquiry*  
ANIMADVERSIONS

ON

EXISTING CIRCUMSTANCES

AMONG

ANTIBURGHER SECEDERS.

IN QUERIES, ADDRESSED TO MINISTERS AND  
OTHERS OF THAT PARTY.

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BY ONE OF THEMSELVES.

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*—Not as many who deal deceitfully with the Word of God; but as of  
sincerity; but as of God, in the sight of God speak—in Christ.*

2 Cor. ii. 17.

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SOLD IN GLASGOW AND EDINBURGH.

1794



## P R E F A C E.

**W**HEN one puts pen to paper, on the measures of his own party, he is expected to defend without exception every one of them; and he who deviates will need an apology; for he seems inconsistent, and a false friend. This conclusion is not always well founded. A true friend once had reason to say, *Ye count me for an enemy, because I tell you the truth.* “But the truth ought not to be told in such manner: This is telling in *Gath*, and publishing in *Askelon*.” These words might have weight, were it not that nothing in a public religious profession can, or ought to be secret. The matters blamed in the following pages it is impossible to hide: and it seemed the most friendly office the writer could perform, to expose their malignity, that they may be relinquished. To the present manner he seemed limited in the performance of this office.

He is a real friend to the party; but so much the more earnestly laments existing abuses. Though he sees these, however, he is not at liberty to leave the communion, for two reasons: He cannot find another connection exempted from similar, or greater abuses; and he dare not exclude himself from communion with the Church of Christ. At any rate, before any step of separation ought to be taken, some attempt to obtain relief seems necessary. These remarks are intended as of that nature; and the manner chosen seemed best calculated for extensive application, and indeed the only one competent to a person in a private capacity. The subscription is omitted, not because the writer would fear to say all he has written, but because such an appearance would seem to some not suitable for him, and lest his insignificance, real or supposed, should frustrate his design. (If the truth be told, no matter who tell it). If some things seem unguarded, or too strongly expressed, let the importance of the subject, and his concern

concern in it, plead his apology. If any thing be exaggerated, let it be clearly pointed out, he will be happy to retract, and would rejoice in a demonstration that all his complaints are utterly groundless. But whatever is true and important he expects will obtain cognizance.

Sanguine hopes arise from the review of our Testimony, at present in agitation. If any thing in these pages shall in any degree serve to guard the committee, who have the management of that matter, against attempting to *heal the wound slightly*, by applying a mere palliative, or excite them to endeavour a radical cure, the writer will rejoice: and if any thing advanced shall serve to prevent divisions in the church, by reconciling ministers and others to such salutary alterations as may be proposed, his end will be attained. In the meantime, it seems necessary, till such alteration be attained, that the exercise of ministers and others be left more free; that a strict conformity to doubtful rules be dispensed with. This may be deemed disorderly; but it is better that order be sacrificed to conscience, than conscience to order; better the means give way to the end, than the end give way to what is at best but a mean; absurd, that means destructive of the end should be continued in use.

If this inquiry be reckoned by some, improper, and the writer arrogant, he satisfies himself in the sentiments contained in the following words: *When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said before them all—Why?—Will ye speak wickedly for God? will ye talk deceitfully for him? Our rejoicing ought to be this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have our conversation in the world. We should not be as many who deal deceitfully with the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God, should speak in Christ. Wherefore, laying aside—all guile—let us speak the truth every one to his brother. Let us purge out the old leaven, and stand, having our loins girt about with truth.*



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CANDID INQUIRY,  
&c.

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QUERY I.

**A**N important question, requiring an affirmative answer, is, Whether it be the duty of individuals and societies, in their religious exercises, to cultivate universally, strict simplicity and godly sincerity?—To this the Holy Ghost answers most clearly in the affirmative. Those who speak with a double heart and flattering lips, are the wicked. He who has a good prospect of enjoying God in perfection, is one who speaketh the truth in his heart. This is true of societies, as well as of persons in a religious character. Religion immediately respects Deity; but we must not lie for God: we must not speak deceitfully even for him. In simplicity and godly sincerity, says an eminent Apostle, we had our conversation among you.

A Jesuit, indeed, will argue, that for the advancing of religion, it is lawful for him to perpetrate what would otherwise be unlawful. I am not writing for Jesuits, but for those who profess to be witnesses for Christ, to buy the truth and not to sell it, to be valiant for the truth upon the earth, to confess Christ and all his ways before men. When, therefore, it is inquired, Whether integrity, simplicity, and godly sincerity, ought to characterize our religious conduct, hesitation must give way to undoubted assent.

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QUERY 2. Ought not a religious Testimony to be impartial in the choice of its objects; and is not its proper object, truth or error as such, sin or duty because such? The declared motive of a Testimony is zeal for the glory of God, and against every thing which tends to dishonour him. Every revealed truth of religion is important, and every opposing error, dangerous; all sin is to be opposed, all duty promoted. The circumstances which direct a Testimony against particular sins or errors, and in favour of particular truths or duties, must be, their importance, prevalence, danger, benefit, or the knowledge concerning them already attained by the testifier. When, therefore, known truths, of equal importance, are equally opposed; they have equally a claim for testimony; when known errors, of equal malignity, are equally propagated, they equally call for opposing testimony. The same is true also with respect to sin and duty in conduct. Says the Psalmist, I love thy law; but I hate every false and wicked way. I love whatever is contained in thy law: all thy word hath been true and sure from the beginning. I hate every false and wicked way, because false and wicked. So says every true Christian; so says every religious society, if suitably exercised: and, accordingly, the Testimony for truth and virtue, against error and iniquity, will be impartial, and extensive as knowledge.

QUERY 3. Whether or not is the Secession Testimony now exhibiting to the world partial and defective? To those who would be faithful, this is an important question; and it would be desirable if we could answer in the negative. I fear, however, the opposite is true. Our Testimony is justly intitled, A Testimony for a Covenanted Reformation, and against Defection from the same in former and present times. If this title be just, our Testimony

timony must be defective. Here that Reformation is set up as the standard of perfection : yet certainly there might be, and there was, something worth attainment, and yet unattained in It. Some defection or sin not pointed against It, may call for cognizance. Our Testimony implies in its title, That the Reformation in question, embraced whatever is worth testifying for, or against ; and that it contained nothing exceptionable or wrong.

It must be granted that every testimony will be defective. It cannot properly extend farther than the knowledge of the testifier, and this knowledge is always defective. It is scarcely probable that our fathers, compilers of the Testimony, saw no flaws in the Reformation ; yet granting they did not, as circumstances alter cases, we now can clearly see, that in that Reformation there was much defect, and a large quantity of impropriety ; and so, whatever might be the case of our forefathers, as to us the Testimony is partial and defective. Even supposing the Reformation a perfect business, and the Testimony at its first exhibition also perfect, it could not, in the course of things, abide so. New errors and abuses might arise : they have arisen ; and these need cognizance equally with those of earlier origin, require equally as the former a Testimony ; and if they be omitted, the Testimony must be defective.

Farther, our Testimony embraces the doctrines and recorded practices of our Reformers as one Whole : as we testify for them, without stating any exception, our Testimony must be thus understood by the world. Now, it is very possible there might be some evils which required a special Testimony against them, and yet have escaped the notice of our godly reformers ; but as knowledge is progressive, and as we are accountable for Our knowledge ; if it be evident, that something requiring distinct

testimony was really omitted in the Reformation of our forefathers; that something calling for assertion was neglected, or something requiring opposition and condemnation was connived at or homologated; our Testimony must appear Defective and Partial. This however may appear with additional evidence in our next inquiry.

QUERY 4. Is not our Testimony in many instances foreign and misapplied?

A Testimony is misapplied, or impertinent, if it dwell more on matters of less, than on those of greater importance. Matters of testimony, existing in present time, must be more important than those existing in past. In the present time we live; in it we are to perform the duties of our station and relations; the matters of error and sin which occur in our own days, and in our own observation, require our chief attention: past periods are to have some, but not the whole, nor the chief regard.

We cannot deny that our Testimony dwells chiefly on antiquities, and allusions to occurrences long past. This must indeed be the case with every written Testimony of long standing, and not frequently reviewed: in it, the past and more early will occupy the place due to what is present or recent. The past obtains thus not only an unjust preference to the present; but often monopolizes the whole attention, and excludes it almost entirely from its due regard. Even the limited powers of the mind prevent the strictest attention to both; and thus the more important is overlooked.

This is a growing evil. If we preserve, in the written Testimony, all the past, and also insert the recent occurrences as they happen; it would soon become so voluminous, that, to digest it in the manner requisite to a conscientious profession, would be difficult, if not impossible. At least, supposing,



as is now the case, that the acknowledgement of the Testimony, is a term of Communion, and this acknowledgement never to be made but in exercise of judgement and conscience, (as certainly ought to be the case;) a lifetime would be too short to attain an adequate acquaintance with the Testimony, though its application to practice were out of the question. There is perhaps too much of this at present the case. Indeed, every written Testimony of long standing, and referring to particulars, must be in some degree foreign; and those who make it the standard of their public profession, must seem to swallow the camel, while they strain at the gnat.

This imperfection of our Testimony, with respect to the present time, arises from its temporary, local, and personal nature. To an impartial reader, it must appear calculated only, or chiefly, for the meridian of Scotland. It is indeed doubtful, whether the first Seceders had their views sufficiently extended beyond the limits of their own country. Our ideas seem to have been cramped by modes familiar, and which existed at home. This might not prevent the propriety of the Testimony when first exhibited; or its pertinency in the view of those acquainted with the places, persons, and particular occurrences mentioned. Ecclesiastical proceedings as to Mess. Simpson and Campbell, with all their minutiae, were then recent, and in memory; the act concerning Capt. Porteous could then be better judged of; the truth concerning a Mr Nimmo, an affair at Cambuslang, &c. could then be more easily attained, without danger of misrepresentation: All these might then be proper examples of evils testified against, and were fitted to convince the mind. Now, however, they are less pertinent. It is unprofitable, or hurtful, to impose upon one desiring to become a Seceder, the task of

deciding in these matters : Yet, supposing his testimony rational, he must either so decide, or proceed upon the credit of predecessors, (some of whom might be under the influence of prejudice), or else accede to the Testimony at random. To continue these references seems the less necessary, as a woful abundance of similar matter at present exhibits itself full in our view.

QUERY 5. It may be proper to inquire, Whether our Testimony do not embrace some points *materially wrong* ? As far as a religious Testimony is seen to be partial and defective, it is blameable, and needs amendment. The same is necessary, if it be misapplied, and foreign ; but much more so, if it be, in any point, favourable to moral evil, to the existence or continuance of abuse. The Title of our public Testimony avows, that we approve of the Reformation, Covenants, and Westminster Confession. This avowal must be understood as total and unlimited ; for while no exceptions are stated, and a general approbation declared, every single point comes in for its share of the approbation, equally with every other ; and if any one point be alledged not included, there is the same, or equal reason, to exclude every other.

The matters thus totally approved, however, involve the approbation and homologating of a wicked junction of Church and State. Such a junction, upon strict scrutiny, cannot be vindicated from some degree of implicated blasphemy ; besides that, it is injurious to men. If consistent with itself, it must raise a creature to that respect and observance, which is the prerogative of the Deity. It generally involves also a certain degree of persecution or oppression. Governors, as such, have nothing to bestow on any class of subjects, except what is levied from the mass. To assist the mass, in favour of any class, seems like plundering the whole.

whole to aggrandize a few : it seems evidently unjust, and a wrong from which the faithful ought to keep free. Besides, civil interposition in behalf of religion, except to defend rights natural and common to all, cannot be of importance for its advancement. Temporal favour, bestowed on a particular sect of religionists, seems intended to render that sect more respectable and numerous. If the favour has not this effect, it is in a great measure useless ; and as far as the mere temporal favour has this effect, it has a tendency to mar true religion. He who accedes to the party from this consideration, appears under the influence, not of the love of the Father, but of love to this world. At the same time, other parties suffer a glaring injustice. Every person thus suffers, who, on account of any thing in his character purely religious, and justly cognizable by God alone, is subjected to temporal hardship, or deprived of temporal advantage. One of these, or both, seems necessary to a state-religion ; at least has occurred in every state-religion which has hitherto appeared. On this point it is not necessary to insist. Those for whom chiefly I write, Seceders, and especially their religious instructors, have, in general, a clear conviction of the unreasonableness, iniquity, and pernicious tendency of any such alliance between Church and State.

Such alliance is, however, evidently acknowledged, with approbation, in the Covenants and Confession for which we profess to testify. This cannot possibly be denied. As to Covenants, the very title *National Covenant*, and the numerous acts of parliament to which appeal is made, are for a thousand proofs. To the Solemn League, Confession, and Catechisms, acts of parliament are prefixed, and there is a preliminary declaration, that by these acts the forms are ratified and established.

blished. Even without these, indeed, the truth could be discerned in the forms themselves.

What was thus wrong in these forms, is practically homologated, and even adopted by us, in our public Testimony. As far as we testify for these forms, without disclaiming any part as objectionable, we testify for every part, and for every part alike. But even though nothing were intrinsically wrong in these forms, or in our public Testimony to them; yet in present circumstances, we could not be blameless in such an adherence. While, (as is the case), on the topic of religious liberty, a number, perhaps the majority of ministers and people, are of opinions contrary to those expressed in these forms, it is evidently wrong for them to maintain such a Testimony.

Our Seceding fathers, it is confessed, had not their views of religious liberty sufficiently enlarged. In compiling the Testimony, they used expressions correspondent to their own ideas. It seems unreasonable and inconsistent, that we, whose ideas on this subject are different or contrary, should publish our Testimony to the world in the same expressions. Our Testimony will and must be received in the world in the native sense of the expressions, and not according to any far-fetched gloss we may put on them. While we endeavour to impose such glosses on the public, we expose ourselves to ridicule. If we allow men to discover our sentiments from our written Testimony, we keep them in the dark. If the discovery is to be made, by a comparison of this Testimony with our conversation or sermons, the result must be, that we are inconsistent and self-contradictory.

No reproach on our worthy reformers is here intended, far less on those who engaged in testifying against the insufferable tyranny and corruption of the Established Church. I approve their intentions,



tentions, and wish to bless God for the good he then did by them. At the same time, I can suppose that they saw but in part, and were defective in execution. Themselves never presumed on perfection, nor dreamed of immutability; and perhaps never, that their successors would lazily sit down at that point to which they had attained. In such a stop, we differ from all reformers, and violate our engagements to reformation. It is the character of reformers to proceed. If, though comparatively dwarfs in talents or religious zeal, yet, helped by the labours, and raised on the gigantic shoulders of our godly predecessors, we discover what was hidden from them, we ought to be thankful for the advantage, and to improve it by imitating whatever is blameless in their conduct. In their practice, in the very act of seceding, we find a practical opposition to Church and State alliance; in their separate communion, they gave relief against many of its pernicious effects; though in the public forms, through fear, or ignorance, or inadvertency, they continued to avow and approve. But how far we come short of an honest disposition to prosecute reformation, will appear when we examine our present mode of exhibiting to the world our religious Testimony.

QUERY 6. Is our conduct, in acceding to the Testimony, consistent with simplicity and godly sincerity, with that integrity which true Christianity requires?

When a person, wearied with tyranny and domination in an Established Church, unable to find the sincere milk of the word administered, or the ordinances and institutions of Christ duly observed; offended with the want of zeal and inconsistency in various kinds of Dissenters, wishes to become a Seceder, he signifies his intention to the Session. He is, or ought to be, first instructed, to get acquainted

ed with the Confession, Catechisms, and Act and Testimony. When he can declare that he has considered these, his approbation of them is required ; and this approbation must be professed before the Session. Persons, who think for themselves, often demur at this ; yet, convinced of the importance of being in some church-communion, and in the purest they can find ; they often make an effort, and choose what they think the less evil. In such a case, it may be often a question, Whether the person does actually approve of every thing in this Confession, Catechisms, or Testimony. Nay, perhaps, many members of the Session, or the minister himself, may disapprove of some things in them. Possibly the acceder, or some of the Session, may be able to discern in some of these standards inconsistency. Approbation of what is wrong, a testifying against what is harmless or proper, may be discovered ; and yet the Session requires, and the acceder gives his approbation of the whole, without stating one exception. This profession of approbation is the condition of admission into communion. In this general profession, every part of the standards is equally included. All the articles of the Confession are acknowledged as true ; whatever the Testimony approves as good ; every particular condemned is disclaimed. The acceder may have his exceptions ; but in his accession he indulges a mental reservation with respect to them. His public profession embraces equally these, as those parts he with his heart avows. They are therefore, as far as profession ascertains matters, as certainly to be esteemed his principles, as any other articles in his creed. Often, however, they are not in reality a part of his belief ; not believed by the Session ; not even by the minister who presides at the accession.

When this is the case, there seems to be a disagreeable absence of open integrity. It seems scarcely

scarcely defensible, to require and receive such a profession, and scarcely conscientious to give it: especially if it be considered, that ministers, sessions, and acceders, receive and give such profession in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in a solemn manner, as in the presence of God, who cannot be deceived.

These considerations seem to weigh much with many godly persons, who approve of us for holding a Testimony, though they approve not every article of that Testimony; who prize the sincere milk of the word, and approve of our strict scriptural discipline. Many of these attend regularly to hear the gospel, but cannot swallow the whole profession. Some, however, are, as it were, constrained, by a sense of duty, to present their children for baptism, to join in some communion, or, urged by a regard of the command of their dying Lord, to communicate. At such a crisis, a person of conscience is often in a strait between his objections, and his desire to join. Some give way to their objections, and join with a party who are less difficult in their preliminaries, and less agreeable in the rest of their profession and practice. Others act over the belly of their objections, and accept the Testimony, as a mixture of sweet and bitter. The consideration, that the making of this profession is soon over, and that afterwards the person is in agreeable connections, has here considerable weight. It is true, that remaining in the communion is, virtually, a continuance of the profession; but as this is less explicit, so it is less attended to by persons concerned. It most frequently happens, however, that such persons have occasion to present their children in baptism, and then the explicit declaration of profession is again necessary.

QUERY 7. Whether integrity and truth are the characteristics

characteristics of this transaction? When a parent applies for baptism to his child, presents it, and obtains the administration of that ordinance; is there no trespass against simplicity and godly sincerity in the whole transaction? Are the public declarations made, the expression of the thoughts of the heart?

Here the profession is public: it is solemn. What is declared, is before God and many witnesses of mankind. Previous to the administration, the parent converses with the minister in private, gives cognizance of his principles, of his knowledge, of his church-membership. In this conversation, he, perhaps, states some objections to the public profession about to be required, and the minister either attempts to remove them, or allows their validity. In private, the minister may concede, that there are some things exceptionable in the public forms; but he in general will rather attempt to explain away the exceptionableness. Such explanation is often used in these cases; but is little more satisfactory, than that offered to prove, that one may subscribe the 39 Articles though he be an Arian or Socinian; or, to prove the consistency of a Seceder, when he swears the Burges's Oath. But this explication, lame as it may be, is not allowed in public. Indeed, it is perhaps as well to be private. In public, the parent, after professing his desire, and in this profession signifying his belief of what is the design of baptism, in our general practice, professes his faith, and avows his obligation to duty.

In the profession of his faith, he, among other things, avows the Westminster Confession to be founded on the Word of God, and to be the confession of his faith. And this avowal makes no distinction between articles more or less important, more or less proper: and far less can it possibly bear



bear, that the person disbelieves any part of the whole. In the same manner, he avows his approbation of the System of Discipline, Form of Church-government, and Directory for Worship. He also avows his approbation of the Act and Testimony, and this approbation includes in it an unlimited approbation of the Covenanted Reformation. The person approves of the Testimony, as it approves of the Reformation. Nay, he is often required to avow his belief, that the Covenants are binding on latest posterity. And here also there is no limitation, not the least supposition, that there may be somewhat improper in these forms. (I have heard a minister, I believe without previous notice, require a parent, publicly to profess his belief of the present seasonableness of Covenanting as practised among Seceders; and the same minister declare, that such an acknowledgement was a term of communion among Seceders. I believe *he* was mistaken. I am sure he was singular, as to many of his brethren, and so consider only general practice).

By the public professions above mentioned, any impartial observer, who would form his estimate of the creed of the minister, or parent, must judge, that neither has any objection to the least matter in the whole Reformation, Confession, Catechisms, or Testimony. The profession now made, cannot fairly be interpreted into any other meaning, than an entire approbation of every thing mentioned as approved. The belief of One God, that the Scriptures are the Word of God, &c. are not more explicitly declared, than the acknowledgement of the Confession, as the confession of the person's own faith. Yet, while this profession is so unlimited, it is often true, that the minister who publicly receives and approves this profession, and the person who offers it, and perhaps the more thinking part of the congregation, do not approve of these forms

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entirely; but are convinced that the Covenanted Reformation was in some respects wrong; that some parts of both Confession and Testimony are exceptionable. Now, in such circumstances, where is the sincerity? What is the use of such unlimited profession? As a transaction of worship, is it not like a mocking of God? Is there not here a loud call for change? But laying aside the religious view; to continue this unlimited approbation of every thing in the mean time, while the supreme court has under consideration, an overture, complaining, that many things are wrong, and craving amendment. How inconsistent is the continuation of the practice?

Some members of Synod, have been long impressed with a strong disapprobation of an alliance between church and state. Many, from pulpit or press, have exposed the wickedness and absurdity of such an alliance. At the same time, these cannot but discern that such an alliance figured greatly in the Reformation. It is evident the transaction of Covenanting, as far as it deserves to be characterized national, was in a great measure intended and used as a political engine. In giving unlimited Testimony for the Reformation, members of Synod saw that there was an unavoidable homologating of this alliance. And indeed the whole tenor of the Testimony bewrays this. Some particular parts express it pretty plainly. Ministers, to whom this matter appeared evident, and an important evil, have wished to get rid of it, and have therefore proposed an overture of alteration. The final issue, in consequence, is not yet fully known; but that, while such a case is pending, we should insist on the same implicit and unlimited avowal of entire approbation, seems inconsistent and unaccountable. Perhaps the same will appear in some degree true, if we enquire,

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QUERY 8. Whether our conduct in covenanting, as this is transacted among us, be marked with integrity, candour, and reason? and whether it be most conducive to the good of the church, and edification of her members?

Covenanting is, to the world, the most distinguishing and prominent feature of our communion. The transaction itself is most solemn. In this especially, it would be desirable to have our doctrine clear and consistent, and our practice unexceptionable.

Whether covenanting be a duty incumbent on Christians, I dispute not: To a candid mind the matter seems evident. As we are creatures dependent on God for every thing, and possessing all our enjoyments from him, it is certainly our duty, in our hearts to be entirely devoted to his service: and if so, it is duty also, with the mouth to glorify God in expressing this devotedness. This is no more than an honest man expressing the best sentiments of his mind, and it amounts to the same thing as covenanting. If this be so evidently our duty as we are rational creatures, it is much more evidently so, and our obligation much stronger, as we are bought with a price. For the same reasons, social covenanting in the most explicit manner, must appear evidently a duty. This is no more than the agreement of a number in the same dutiful exercise.

That personal covenanting is the duty of every adult Christian, and solemn social covenanting the duty of Christians in society, seems to me so evident as to need little demonstration; and if any be needed, it is abundantly given by our judicious writers who have vindicated the duty\*.

But though the duty as to its matter be perfectly clear, it may be clogged with circumstances

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which will render it impracticable. If circumstances are annexed by the society, which cannot be innocently complied with by the individual, he is barred from joining in the exercise, and it is his duty to abstain. It is the certain duty of true Christians, to join in the social commemoration of the death of Christ; but if my sitting down at the Lord's table, were to involve in it an avowal of the doctrine of Transubstantiation, I am not at liberty to sit down: So, though social covenanting be a clear and confessed duty; yet, if I have it not in my power to join in the observance without avowing an entire approbation of the transactions of our fathers in the national covenant and solemn league; while, at the same time, my judgement disapproves; if I must solemnly confess to God, matters as evil, which I believe in my heart are not so, and avow matters contrary to these to be good, while I esteem them opposite, I am, at least, excusable, though I do not join in social covenanting in such circumstances. In the transaction of covenanting, as observed among us, we profess to renew the covenants of our forefathers; and the whole transaction is gone over with circumstances of awful solemnity, and as in the presence of the Lord God.

While the covenant entered into by our forefathers is reading, the covenanters are sitting signifying their unlimited approbation; (their hearts may think otherwise; but this is the language of their appearance: and the idea of renewing covenant includes so much.) By their appearance, they say that all those particulars, testified against by our fathers, were really evil; that all of what was approved in their Testimony was really good; that all to which they engaged was duty, and all against which they engaged was sin. They are signifying also still more explicitly, that they do judge all these

these matters mentioned in the acknowledgement of sins prefixed to our Bond, to be really sins, and they engage, by solemn oath, to struggle against them as really sins. If public profession can signify any thing, it cannot signify less in these instances, than is here stated.

Now while the covenanter is thus employed, let us view the exercise of his mind. While his appearance and profession approve of the transaction of his forefathers, and that without limitation; perhaps it is his judgement, that they confessed as evils what he can neither condemn nor approve; that they confessed some things as sins, which he, according to his judgement, must have been engaged in, had he been present; that some things were engaged to, as matter of duty, which he disapproves. While he professes acknowledging to God as sins the whole of the articles mentioned in our own acknowledgement of sins, he reckons many of these dubious if good or evil, many trifling, some desirable. And (awful!) while he, in the solemn Oath, engages to oppose, to his utmost ability, every of the things mentioned as evils in the aforesaid acknowledgement, he means in his heart to exert no activity against some of them; and others he wishes to promote and advance: some he reckons indifferent, at others he rejoices. If particulars were necessary, they might be mentioned. While the covenanter professedly recognizes the transactions of his fathers, and the Confession *as ratified and established* by parliament, he publicly avows, but secretly abhors the Church-and-State connexion which appears in that transaction, that authority which was employed by parliament in establishing, and that particular instance of its exercise interposed in the ratification.—He publicly confesses the sinfulness of repealing penal laws against witches, thus intimating his approbation of these laws, and sorrow at the repeal; but in his heart he rejoices that

the law is repealed, and abhors the ancient cruel and absurd statute. And certainly his heart is right in this instance, and his profession wrong. A review of the execution of the statute proves this. We defend by saying, that by *Witch* we understand a professed *Fortuneteller*, against whom penal statutes should remain in force. Our defence is vain: The statute did not affect chiefly professed fortunetellers, our fathers did not intend these; nor, when we use in our solemn confession the word *Witches*, can we expect the world to understand that we intend fortunetellers.

He publicly laments, as a national sin, but secretly rejoices for the slackness of government in *extirpating* Popery and Prelacy, and in its granting unbounded toleration to all sects of professed Christians: and here also his secret exercise seems most commendable. In defence, we here alledge, that the word *extirpate*, in the covenants of our fathers, did not include any thing sanguinary, or any temporal punishment; and the explanation which supposes it does, we reckon an abuse and misinterpretation. Our defence, however, fails, when we compare the expression in question, with Conf. 19. 4. where it is declared, that erroneous persons, of a particular description, may be lawfully proceeded against, by the power of the civil magistrate. And its failure appears still more conspicuous, if we consult on this subject the old Confession, which declares, that obstinate heretics are to be punished, not only by the censures of the church, but by civil pains; to imprisonment, to confiscation of goods, to banishment, and to death. The strict laws against sheltering any Popish teachers are also clear evidence to the same purpose.

We alledge ourselves justified in condemning the Toleration, because it proceeded from an *intention* to introduce Popery. This might be one reason,  
and



and may be the best we can now assign of those which then had weight. Our fathers, however, in the Acknowledgement, state the Toleration as evil, because contrary to the covenants, because unbounded, because it opened a door for the propagating of error. None of these seem now to be reasons which breathe much the spirit of religious liberty. As far as this counteracted the Covenants, the latter were perhaps wrong; the more unbounded it was, and the wider door it opened to error, it came the nearer to true religious liberty. Indeed, as the Toleration flowed from the King's supremacy, and supposed in him a power to restrain, it was truly detestable. This circumstance is indeed mentioned, and properly disapproved by our fathers; but the other things complained of could not be prevented, without the exercise of the same supremacy, worse applied. Other instances might be adduced, of the covenanters' profession at war with his sentiment, and of the superior excellency of the latter; but these may suffice to show that such is often the fact.

These considerations shew, that there are, to a conscientious thinking person, real difficulties attending the observance of social covenanting as practised among Seceders. These difficulties appear the more important, if we consider, that our principles concerning covenanting are recognised in all the distinguishing parts of our profession. At accession, a person is called to acknowledge the binding force of the covenants of our forefathers; and the same acknowledgement is required when he presents his child for baptism: the same is implied also in his communicating with us in the Lord's Supper. This acknowledgement certainly involves an approbation of the covenants of our forefathers; and as the acknowledgement is unlimited, so the approbation must be understood to be

be unlimited also: frequently however the entire approbation of judgement is wanting.

Besides, it is to be feared that those who acknowledge this obligation, have seldom any clear idea in what it consists. None can suppose that these covenants could bind, as far as they might include any thing sinful. None may bind himself by any oath to the performance of wickedness, and far less could he bind any other. Farther, it seems evident, that ancestors have no power, by covenant, to bind upon posterity things indifferent in themselves. In this case, the act of ancestors would be will-worship, and the acknowledgement of it, would be a paying that regard to the institutions of men, which is due to God's law alone. Besides, it would suppose, that one generation of men uninspired, have greater powers than any other race succeeding. Farther, in this case, it would be necessary to inquire, Whether we are thus obligated by our relation to the nation as subjects or inhabitants? or whether the obligation is conveyed by our natural descent from covenanting ancestors? On both sides insuperable difficulties occur. The former would suppose, that whenever any person enters into the nation, he comes under a new religious obligation; and besides, the Church-and-State alliance is here approved. The latter would require, that a person, to know whether he be included in the obligation, should be able to ascertain, whether he be indeed descended from covenanting ancestors. This inquiry must be exceedingly difficult. In some cases, as among the descendants of covenanting kings and nobility, the inquiry would be disgraceful, and the truth inscrutable. To matters of indifference, then, posterity cannot be bound by any covenant of their forefathers.

They can be bound to nothing but such as they would be, and are bound to, (as strongly as the law

law of God commands) independently of any such Covenant. Our fathers could bind themselves, in a religious sense, to nothing but what the law of God required of them, nor their posterity to any thing which the same law does not bind on them. It is here said, there is a superadded obligation: An obligation added to what is already absolutely perfect! An accession of strength to what is infinitely strong!

It is true, sins are aggravated by circumstances. Our sins in neglecting the duty of covenanting, in committing those sins against which our ancestors engaged, or neglecting those duties to which they swore, may be aggravated, and rendered more inexcusable, by the good example of our forefathers. If obligation by Covenants of our forefathers has any farther meaning than this, or something like this, it is to me perfectly unintelligible; if not absurd. Scripture does not authorize it.

However, though this idea may be in the minds of some, when they acknowledge the perpetual obligation of the covenants; it may be doubted, whether it be the idea naturally conveyed by the expression, or at first intended to be expressed. It is more improbable, that this idea should be present with all who acknowledge this obligation. Indeed, it is most probable, that many of these have no clear notion of the subject. They acknowledge an obligation; but how they came under it, or in what it consists, and often to what it binds, they are ignorant. This acknowledgement is, however, required at accession to our communion, and recognized in many of our public professions during continuance in it.

Actual covenanting is an observance to which, comparatively few, ordinary church-members can be persuaded. It is found impracticable to make, or retain this as a term of ordinary communion.

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Even church-members, however, are generally expected to profess that they are *lying open to light on this subject*; and many lie all their life thus open to a light which they never intend to use; for conviction as to the duty of an observance against which they have insuperable objections. Whatever latitude is allowed to ordinary Christians in this matter, the case is different with church-officers, ministers, and elders.

Formerly, a young man, who had a view to the ministry, could not be admitted to the study of divinity, till he was an actual covenanter. At present, he is admitted, though he be only lying open to light; but he is expected to declare, that he has no objections against the observance as practised, and is only waiting for an opportunity. After the usual time is spent at the hall, and the usual exercises performed; the next step is, that the young man be called to exhibit specimens of his talents with a view to licence. To this step he cannot be admitted unless he has been actually a covenanter. Till he be of this class he cannot be even recommended. No consideration is made of his objections, or the points really and confessedly objectionable in the transaction. If his conscience be so squeamish, that he cannot swallow and digest all, it is needless to take any cognizance of his talents: this one article is thought sufficient to render him certainly unfit.

In some congregations, the case, as to the admission of elders, is the same. In this respect, indeed, congregations differ: a little of Independency is admitted or connived at, and it is so far good, that the article of strict uniformity is dispensed with; but in some places, a person cannot be proposed to an election for the eldership, if he is not an actual covenanter.

It may be doubted, whether the strict requisition



tion of this qualification does not really hurt the cause of religion. A young man, who has spent a third, or a half of his lifetime, preparing for a public employment in the Church, is loath to let all go for nothing. His conscience cannot allow him to join and remain in other communion; he is therefore, at least, under strong temptations, over the belly of his objections, to take the covenant too much in the mode of a qualifying test. When it is observed, that a young man generally gets over his objections, and finishes his course at the hall nearly about the same time; that after his studies there are finished, or when he has a near view of their finishing, he sees that to be duty which he could never before discern in this light; there is reason to fear that this is too frequently the case.

It is sometimes evidently otherwise. Some retain their objections after a due time has been spent at the hall; and others defer or interrupt attendance on the hall on this very account. Such are thus detained from public service; and thus the Church is deprived of the service of, perhaps, not the meanest talents; of those who think for themselves, and are conscientious; while a door is open for the admission of others who may be less discerning, take their religion on trust, and are not more conscientious or prudent.

The same observation applies also to elders, where this qualification is required as a prerequisite to the exercise of that office. And example is not wanting, of a congregation deprived, on this very account, at several successive elections, of two, three, perhaps four, who in all other respects seemed of the most eligible in the congregation, who were mentioned for the election; but it was declared that the nomination would be disorderly, as the persons were not joined in the bond.

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A degree of disorder is perhaps here preferable to such strict adherence to rules so objectionable.

QUERY 9. I come now to inquire into the tendency of our conduct in the use of the Formula. The Formula consists of a number of questions, so devised that a simple affirmative or negative answer to each, according to its respective nature, amounts to a declaration of the distinguishing principles of the Secession church. This Formula is used when young men are separated to preach the Gospel, or ordained to exercise the office of the Ministry; and also at the ordination of elders. And in the cases of these classes, no difference in the Formula is admitted, saving what the different circumstances seem to require.

The profession of faith made at answering the Formula, is materially the same as at the administration of baptism, and other cases already considered. Here, however, the profession is more pointed; and with respect to expression, more invariable. At the administration of baptism, the minister, either intentionally or inadvertently, may change the expression. This is surely improper, as it takes the professor at unawares. His assent is required ere he has time to consider. As to the Formula, it is otherwise: the questions are in a printed book; and the answer which must be given to each of them is perfectly known. The profession made on this occasion is of the most solemn kind. It appears to be a declaration in the presence of God, a vow to the living God. The profession and engagement are generally made in the presence of many witnesses: and, as the person is now entering on a public office for life, he as it were fixes his religious character. In fact, he engages to remain the same, in that respect, to his life's end.

If every article, of that faith professed in answering

swering the Formula, were true, and congruous to the sentiments of the professor; and every thing engaged to as duty, proper to be done, and believed by the professor to be indeed his duty; the administration of these questions, for the purpose intended, must meet our approbation, and be highly esteemed. On the other hand, if any thing, in the profession of faith, be untrue, or opposite to the real sentiments of the professor; if any thing be engaged to, as duty, which is either not duty, or not believed to be so; there is, in this observance, something importantly wrong: and in this case, all the circumstances which heighten the solemnity, must aggravate the evil.

In Formula, Q. 2, The person is called to profess his belief of the *whole* doctrine contained in the confession and catechisms, and avows this doctrine as his own faith; and to it he vows before God and rational creatures. In Q. 4. He, in the same unlimited manner, acknowledges the perpetual obligation of the Covenants; acquiescing in these covenants, and also in the acknowledgement of sins. Every thing in our church government also is approved. Q. 3. Every thing in the testimony. Q. 5. Here is also a solemn, tho' but virtual, promise, never to follow divisive courses; i. e. never seek a change, or any alteration from the standard — *the Reformation*, Q. 6. And yet, Q. 9. and 10. He is bound to declare the *whole council of God*.

If we were sure that all these Forms, mentioned in these questions, were perfect, this would be very well; but unless they are so, the case is far otherwise. If any thing blameable can be found, the Formula is not clear from calling good evil, and evil good; putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. There is no possibility of evading this charge. We have already seen, that there are indeed some things exceptionable here avowed.

The avowal is the most unlimited, and as clearly stated as words can express. Here is no room to suppose a reserve in the mind; but a declaration is made that there is no such reserve. The reformation of our ancestors is accordingly treated as immutable; an engagement against seeking to change is plighted; an undertaking of universal defence against every opposition, to whatever part, is solemnly avowed.

If there be, indeed, any thing wrong, in the Reformation, in the Confession of Faith, Covenants, or Act and Testimony, our use of the Formula is also inconsistent with itself, and contradictory: one part of the profession and engagement is at war with another. The person is bound to these forms; but he is also bound to be entirely for the glory of God. If any thing in the former be improper, it is so far opposite to the latter; and it is impossible to perform both parts of the engagement. In this view, we see that the Formula lays the person under a kind of necessity to be unfaithful to obligations. In another view, this is still more glaring. The professor engages, that he will adhere to the *whole* doctrine contained in the *Confession*; the whole of which he declares that he believes: and to the *whole* Covenanted Reformation. He engages too against all courses divisive from the aforesaid Reformation. However, in answering Question 10, there is an engagement, to declare, without ceasing, the *whole council of God*. Now, the declaration of this, which is a minister's proper business, must clash with his engagement to the above forms. In declaring the whole council of God, he must, in some cases, state a dissent from, and follow a divisive course with respect to, the Covenanted Reformation.

It does not remedy the evil, to say, that the matters exceptionable in the Reformation are of small importance.



importance. " Greater and less alter not the nature of things." And our Formula treats these parts as matters of very great importance. The emphatic term *whole* repeated in Q. 2. supposes at least so much. I have no need to prove, that the Formula is exceptionable, on account of its unlimited adherence to what is not entirely right. This is believed and confessed by many among us; and must be allowed by all who disapprove of any the least matter in the whole Covenanted Reformation; and those who have their exceptions are not a few. This consideration, however, renders the case apparently so much the worse. It represents persons knowingly and avowedly embracing and solemnly engaging to the practice of inconsistency.

Let us, for a little, take a view of the inconsistency here exhibited. The person who is to accept the Formula, suppose at licence or ordination, has, perhaps in conversation or from the pulpit, made known his sentiments on those topics in which the forms are to him objectionable. Perhaps he gives a similar expression of his sentiments very soon after. Nay perhaps, of the presbytery present at the transaction, several members may be in similar circumstances. Even on the same day, in their social interviews, their exceptions may be mentioned and avowed.

Though this be the case, this same court requires from the candidate an unlimited assent, equivalent to a solemn renunciation and complete preclusion of all objections. The candidate, tho' in the circumstances above mentioned, gives the most plenary assent to every article, and solemn engagement to every requisition. Prevarication must here appear obvious to the candid observer.

In what light must the candidate appear to those who know his real sentiments, when he solemnly professes to believe the *whole*, and yet really dis-

believes some parts; to approve without exceptions, while he yet approves not without exceptions; to desire no change, while yet he eagerly desires one; to follow no divisive courses, while yet he has declared, and means to declare, a dissent in various particulars? The matter appears the more weighty, when we take into account, that the candidate declares his profession, and assumes his engagement, with the solemnity of an oath, and awfulness of a curse. He professes and engages, as he is to be "answerable at the coming of the Lord Jesus, and as he would desire to be happy with him at his glorious appearance." In what light must the members of presbytery who have objections appear to those who know their sentiments, while they connive at, approve, and assist in conducting such a transaction? In what light will the wicked of the world regard that office and character which requires such a preliminary? In what light will they view religion itself, if its public teachers and stated friends, in their most solemn exercises, must admit into their conduct such flagrant duplicity? And what is the native consequence to the interests of religion, and to the souls of men? It grieves me to the heart, that "such things may be alledged, and cannot be refuted."

To you, Brethren, it belongs. Strive for a remedy: By earnest prayer, and vigorous endeavour; by zeal for God; by impartial befriending of every truth, and courageous opposition to the most popular errors; by steady resolution not to spare the dearest abuse, nor shrink from attempting the most disagreeable part of necessary Reformation: let us resolve upon an impartial, universal, and radical scrutiny; upon confessing, resigning, and disclaiming, whatever may be found improper; retaining and vindicating whatever appears right; cheerfully, prudently, and vigorously essaying and prosecuting,  
every

every necessary and salutary amendment. In such a scrutiny, perhaps several other matters, besides these mentioned, might appear to require attention. To be convinced of this, we may inquire, for example,

QUERY 10. What is our general practice with respect to the Administration of the Lord's Supper, and the Settlement of Vacant Congregations ?

As to the former : We reckon it and treat it as a most solemn ordinance ; and a conduct blameless, to a certain degree, is necessary in those who are admitted to the participation. Our Lord hath intimated, and we avow, that this ordinance should be frequently observed by his people. We allow that, in the primitive ages of Christianity, the societies of the faithful were thus employed every Lord's day, and we approve of their practice. In our mode, however, such frequency is impossible. It is seldom above twice, often but once observed in the same congregation, in a whole year. But, to give frequent opportunities, different congregations fix on different times for the ordinance ; and several ministers meet to assist at the service. This is necessary, as there are several days partly employed in public worship, and a routine of service to which one person is not equal : and it is the less inconvenient, as, in the neighbouring congregations, many chuse rather to attend where the communion is, than abide at home ; and so the want of sermon is the less disagreeable. There is, however, some inconvenience here. The whole congregation cannot follow their minister ; or if they could, perhaps they cannot be accommodated : And so, many are precluded the enjoyment of public ordinances.

It might be desirable that such inconvenience be prevented. Perhaps it might be equally conducive to edification, and it would be certainly no less conformable to the primitive examples of Christi-

anity, if the Lord's Supper were more frequently observed in each congregation. Thus every Christian in a society might enjoy a more frequent opportunity of obeying Christ's command, and would be more seldom deprived of the dispensation of the gospel.

Here it will be objected, that frequency would lessen solemnity, and render partakers more careless in preparation and observing. It might as well be alledged, that we are not to pray, nor to endeavour the exercise of faith frequently, lest we lessen the impression of their importance. Enjoyments truly religious don't cloy, but whet the desire; and in exercises truly religious the well employed Christian increases his strength.

But "one minister could not undergo the whole toil; and weak congregations could not bear the frequent expence." The toil might perhaps decrease, if it met with resolute endeavour. The number of communicants at one solemnity would be fewer; fewer tables contain them; and less labour would be necessary at the exhortation.

As to the week-day services, which are the source of the greater part of the labour, these are of the nature of a freewill-offering; and as far as they are observed in this view, they are no doubt proper, and may be acceptable. In this view, he who dedicates a day, dedicates it to the Lord; and he who professes to dedicate a day, or part of a day, and yet curtails, is obnoxious to the curse denounced against the deceiver who offers to the Lord the *corrupt thing*. The service will be liable to a similar stigma, if such set times should be respected in the light of divine institutions; if they arrogate such immutable respect as is due to the sabbath of the Lord. When our fathers began to exemplify such observances, as accompaniments to the celebration of the Lord's Supper; there



there is no doubt but they had the fear of God before them, love to God in their hearts, and gratitude to him exciting their conduct. But should we affirm, that such accompaniments are indispensable to the proper and acceptable observance of the ordinance, the undue regard to such observances might provoke God to blast their benefit, or render them a snare: There is danger, lest they be viewed in a light too similar to that in which the Papists and Episcopalians view the days dedicated to the idolatrous worship of their Saints and Martyrs.

If in each congregation, the Lord's Supper could be enjoyed sufficiently often, the circumstances of some congregations might admit of the present quantity of week-day service, while it might be unsuitable to the circumstances of others. Those societies who could offer the service, not by constraint, but willingly, would do well: those who could not, ought to be excused. This would lessen the expence to weak congregations; and, together with the reduction of the number of strangers, which would take place in the proposed plan, would render the expence equally or more tolerable than it is at present.

As to the Settlement of Vacant Congregations among us: They have the important privilege of choosing their own ministers, and are untroubled in the exercise of this right. This right is of the utmost importance; but, that the benefit may be enjoyed, it seems necessary, that those concerned should be fully apprised, where it resides, and how it is to be applied. If this is not the case, the good may not be obtained; and while the means are preserved, the end may be lost.

Four things seem necessary to the attainment of the full benefit of this right. The congregation ought to be fully apprised, 1. What description of persons

persons have a right to vote ; 2. What shall constitute a majority ; 3. How this majority is to be discovered ; and 4. What is to be the consequence of a majority on the one side and on the other, as far as possible.

1. As to the First, we are not sufficiently agreed, and our practice is not uniform. It is generally required that the voters be Seceders ; but I am not certain whether a person, while under scandal, is or ought to be, in all cases excluded. I believe this is not settled. In some places, females are excluded, in others they may be electors. That they should be in any case excluded, merely on account of sex, is not enjoined in scripture, and seems contrary to reason. Women are, indeed, prohibited from public teaching ; but we do not, on that account, prohibit them from sitting down at the Lord's table, and there making a public profession. They are admitted to present their children for baptism, and to join in public covenanting. In each of these, they must be as chargeable with *speaking* in the church, as they can be in using their right of suffrage in the choice of a teacher. In a religious view, they are equally interested as the other sex ; and they are often of equal discernment. To exclude a mother in widowhood, is to exclude one of the most interested ; to exclude a wife, because a wife, from an independent suffrage, is to erect a patron in every family, and make the husband, in this instance, lord over the conscience : besides, it gives to a single man, perhaps of precarious residence, an equal quantity of influence, as to him who is a resident householder, and represents a numerous family. And why a female, merely for want of a family connection, should be excluded from the exercise of her right, seems scarcely evident.

In some cases, the right is confined to heads of families.

families. This is liable to equal objections as those above stated, but in a more extensive degree.

In other cases, the suffrage is allowed to such church-members only of either sex, as make distinct contribution for supporting the gospel. To found influence, in this matter, on the payment of contributions, is the very foul of that patronage against which we testify. And besides, this most unreasonable method throws into the hands of a solitary individual, or even of a man or maid servant, who the next season may be far removed, a quantity of influence equal to what is enjoyed by a father and mother, with a numerous family, and of fixed residence.

It seems equal and reasonable, that the quantity of influence be adjusted, as nearly as possible, to the quantity of interest in this affair. And for this purpose, it seems most eligible, that every regular Seceder in the congregation, male and female, whether giving a distinct contribution, or not, should be allowed to vote in the election. This appears calculated for preserving to all their right; and it apportions the influence to the interest of parties.

But whatever be the qualifications entitling to a vote, they ought to be uniform, and generally known. They ought not to be subject to be modified by the inclination, or imperfect views, of the person who presides in the election. Otherwise he will have too much in his power; the people may have just reason to complain; and a lasting dissention may thus originate. The persons disappointed will readily alledge, that, had the mode been different, the majority might have been otherwise; at the same time, while the minority are murmuring, the young man may be in doubt whether he be indeed the object of the majority of just voters, and thus be discouraged from accept-  
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ing the call. Apparently on these accounts, a congregation may be, and has been, deprived of a settlement, and forced to continue long vacant.

2. What is a majority seems easily determined. The chief difficulty occurs when more than two objects are put on the leet. In this case, one may have a greater number of votes than any of the rest, and yet fewer than they have all together; and so not the majority of the congregation. It seems improper on this ground to declare this person elected, and sustain the call; because the majority of the congregation may be averse. The point, however, is not yet settled. Sometimes, a person is declared duly elected on such a foundation; at others, the decision is referred to farther proceedings. At any rate, the people beforehand are ignorant which of the modes may be adopted, and so cannot accommodate to either.

3. In collecting the votes, the chief object is to ascertain, that what is sustained as a majority be indeed what it seems. When there are more than two objects on the leet, sometimes they are all declared off, save those two who have the greatest number of votes; these are put on a new leet, and those who voted for others are called to vote anew, and arrange themselves on either side. This mode gives perfect justice to the candidates retained on the leet; but not to those rejected. It is possible, had the alternative been made, that one of those rejected might have been chosen, rather than the person who is chosen.

For example, in a congregation of 90 voters, A, B, and C, are candidates. The votes for A are 40; for B 30; for C 20. C is declared off, and his voters anew range themselves under A, or B, as each individual may think proper. Here A and B get perfect justice; but the congregation and C are wronged. C's 20 voters may cast the balance



balance in favour of either A or B, or render them equal. But, all the while, C may be more agreeable than either to a majority of the congregation. He is most agreeable to his own 20; and he may be more agreeable than A, to the whole, or to 26 of B's 30; ~~or~~ more agreeable than B, to the whole, or to 26 of A's 40: and in either he would have at least 46, the majority of 90. The probability that this would be the case is not very strong; but the possibility is evident: and since it is so, to prevent reflections in the congregation, and scruple in the mind of the candidate, it might surely be proper to give up this mode for one more perfect. It is certainly painful for a person, who considers the voice of a majority as a call from God to a particular conduct, to engage in such conduct while yet uncertain what is the real mind of the majority, and what the call of God.

Sometimes the successful candidate is otherwise determined. After it appears that A has a greater number of votes than either B or C, the latter are both declared off; and the only remaining question is, A, or not? i. e. A, or remain for a while vacant? As, in the former supposition, C was wronged, here both B and C seem to suffer injury. It is perhaps difficult to hit a plan without exception. Either of these mentioned, however, might be more perfect, if accompanied with some questions of *preference*.—In the former case, C might be justly declared off, after these two questions are put and negatived: 1, Prefer C to A, or not? 2, Prefer C to B, or not?—In the latter case, both B and C might be declared off, after these questions are put and negatived: 1, Prefer B to A, or not? 2, Prefer C to A, or not? Such questions would be more numerous, according to the number of objects; but seem suitable and  
 necessary

necessary to the discovery of a real majority, and for preventing grudge or injury.

Whatever mode be adopted, it ought to be uniform and not unexpected. The people ought not to be taken at unawares; nor the person who moderates allowed to devise an arbitrary mode. It is improper, but perhaps true, that in the same quarter, at four successive elections, four different modes have been adopted: And, seemingly from misunderstanding, a congregation may be kept in a vacant state for several years. A person in the circumstances of A, has been justly outed upon the principles of the first of the two cases mentioned; and upon the principles of the second, the same person unjustly declared to be elected, and his call sustained.

Our common mode of collecting the vote, after the question is stated, is uncertain, troublesome, and subject to litigation; and ought to give way to the method by roll-call, or dividing the house. We must often resort to one of these, after the common mode has proved ineffectual, and has given origin to a lasting strife. To adopt them at first, might save time, and prevent an evil which afterwards we may be unable to remedy.

4. It is necessary, as far as possible, that electors be fully apprized of the tendency of a vote on either side of every question. Before they give their vote, they ought to be informed, and have impressed on their minds, its whole tendency. This is profitable for them; and to afford it, as far as possible, is the duty of an impartial moderator. If this be not attended to, the people may be unjustly deprived of an important advantage, and trepanned into a measure they will afterward regret.

The above observations are equally applicable to decisions in Courts. A, B, C, may represent the objects of a vote in Synod, as well as candidates for the Ministry. And perhaps even there, the

the mode of suffrage is not always proof against animadversion.

On the subject of settlements, the following doctrine seems to be tenable.

1, All regular, adult members of the congregation have a right to vote.

2, The greater number of these forms the majority.

3, This majority to be discovered in a manner indisputable.

4, In a list of more than two objects, that object is to be declared elected, who is preferred by the majority, respectively to each of the others.

5, To find this object, the decision of a competent number of *questions of preference* seems necessary.

6, The whole mode to be uniform, or at least previously understood by the electors.

7, The electors to have always in view, the nature and tendency of every vote.

These observations, however, are proposed with submission. I am now not dictating, but craving remedies to evils which seem important; but as far as any promising observation occurs, it may be offered, and those to whom it is addressed will judge of its propriety. I hope to be understood in a similar view, when I presume to enquire,

QUERY II, What may be the most effectual remedies for the evils complained of in the foregoing pages?

It is much easier to point out evils than to remedy, or even avoid them. Many of the evils mentioned it will be difficult to evade; and in the endeavour we may be in danger of incurring others of equal or greater malignity. Yet, certainly, something ought to be attempted. But what shall this be? Here we need to be lowly and

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dependent, and trust in the divine promise, that God will lead and clearly teach his way.

The first step of this remedy, is to ascertain the existence of the evil. And it will be proper to institute a radical and impartial scrutiny, Whether there be indeed some things defective, foreign, or wrong in our public Testimony? and whether we be really chargeable with dissingenuity in displaying it?

To this examination we ought to come, not backwardly, but cheerfully; not averse to discover what is wrong, but eager to find it, and eager to remedy. Such an examination requires, that we cease from supposing every thing done by our forefathers right, or every thing in our profession blameless. It supposes that we regard every particular with watchful suspicion. Such an examination is our duty; to it we are commanded; and we ought to implore divine aid, and attempt the execution.

2. Such a search will be followed by an open acknowledgement of the evils discovered. If we set out upon the supposition of existing evils, and be eager to find and destroy them, the discovery will not be kept a secret. If it be evident that such things exist, and fully clear that they are evil, it will be improper either to deny their existence or to palliate their malignity. To deny the existence will be a vain attempt; to palliate their malignity, after discovery, must proceed from intolerable pride, and involve the party in the guilt, both of the evil itself, and of the hypocrisy of the palliation.

3. Sincere acknowledgement requires that we forsake and disclaim the evil acknowledged. No regard to consistency of character, or honour of party, should deter us from this. We never pretended to be infallible, or attained at perfection. If our inconsistency lie in departing from evil and prosecuting



profecuting good, it is honourable—it is reformation—it is that to which we are most solemnly bound. We profess our desire to forsake evil, and disclaim error; and will we not set ourselves pointedly against those evils and errors which have done us most harm, and in which we have been chiefly engaged? These are the proper objects of our revenge and eager opposition.

Against these our Testimony ought to be pointedly directed. They are evils equally malignant as others; rivetted in their influence by long indulgence, and rendered popular among the serious by the venerable names who have admitted them. If we spare these, when seen to be evil, we will condemn ourselves in the thing which we allow, and appear chargeable with testifying, in the rest of our profession, not for God, but for men.

In this exercise it will be necessary to give a clear and unequivocal Testimony against all ecclesiastical establishments constituted by civil authority: And not merely against particular instances, but against the principle itself. We profess to testify against Antichristianism; and why not against this species, of influence and existence so extensive, and so long retained by us. As we have been so long backward to abjure it, and obstinate in our adherence, it is now high time strenuously to oppose, and resolutely to discard. This, with all its concomitant evils, we are under special obligations openly to abjure, resolutely to oppose; to give clear Testimony for opposite truth, and vigorously to practise opposite duty.

This principle seems the chief source of every thing exceptionable in our Testimony; and a full renunciation of this will lead to purify, simplify, and accommodate the Testimony to our own times. It needs to be purified, that we may honestly adhere to it; simplified, that we may adhere to it with

judgement; and accommodated to present times, that it may serve the purposes of a Testimony. It is not meant that our forms, or those books in which they are contained, ought to be disused. They are the most excellent of their kind. Both for brevity and clearness, the Confession and Catechisms stand perhaps unparalleled, while in point of doctrine they are the least exceptionable. The Display of the Secession Testimony contains a rich treasure of gospel truth, and a bright exhibition of God's goodness, in enabling his servants to be valiant for the truth. Though the Covenants contain somewhat exceptionable, yet this is comparatively little.

The forms are not in themselves so exceptionable, as our use of them is improper. We may esteem them, and yet not reckon them immutable; we may venerate them, and yet not treat them as absolutely perfect. In our adherence to them, we ought to state our exceptions; or in a new Exhibition of our Testimony, exclude the exceptionable articles.

4. Such an Exhibition would require to leave room for amendment, lest posterity should fall into the same error. A new Exhibition of our Testimony will not be perfect, and ought not to be treated as such. It ought to be left open to correction, and appointed to undergo a frequent review. Thus error could not obtain such firm footing; abuse could not be so permanent.

Were the Testimony thus purified, simplified, and modernized, it must be more valuable: and an adherence to it at obtaining baptism, at accession, or on other occasions, would be a more easy transaction to a tender conscience. In the mean time, it seems necessary that the strict requisition, of unlimited assent to every part of the forms, should be remitted: and though our written  
forms

forms are in some points wrong, our public professions should exhibit a commendable difference from them.

5. The exceptions in the Formula seem easy to be removed. Upon the proposed alterations in other things, they would almost fall of course. At any rate, all improper, even all doubtful and needless expressions, ought to be erased. Perhaps a person ought never to be required to accept such a form without any limitation. As it is never certainly perfect, he might be allowed to declare the sense in which he understands it, and state his exceptions. If he can assent without explanation or exceptions, it is well; if not, the Presbytery can judge, whether his explanation or exceptions are such as have a right to exclude him from the exercise of the office in question. In this way too, a more certain estimate might often be formed of a person's real sentiments, than by the present way of unlimited assent.

6. In Covenanting, it might be better to give up the idea of the perpetual obligation of the ancient covenants, (till this be better explained); and consider our obligation to duty, and to the duty of covenanting as flowing immediately from our perpetual obligation to the law of God. The idea of *renewing* these covenants seems equally untenable. How a few private individuals can properly *renew* a national covenant sworn by nobles, kings, and parliaments, or a solemn league of all the three kingdoms, is not easily understood; besides, this expression involves too much the idea of unlimited approbation. It would be fully as proper that every generation, and every individual, observe the duty on its own account, and independently of ancestors.

Our Acknowledgement of Sins, might be cleared of what is improper, curtailed of what is impertinent,

ment, abridged in what respects antiquity, and extended as to what is recent or present; and thus modernized and adapted to present use. This ought to be an accommodating form, at all times ready to receive important matter, according to existing circumstances. An acknowledgement of this kind could with greater propriety be recognized in the solemn Oath of Covenant.

The bond sworn in this oath ought to be simple and religious, and, like the Acknowledgement, at convenient intervals adapted to the demands of present circumstances. The duty of covenanting might be observed, not as a qualification for entering the pulpit, but by all in general. It seems to be a stated duty, and no reason appears why a single individual may not publicly observe it. The proper season for this might be, when the person accedes to the religious society. The society also might observe it in a social capacity as often as convenient. Perhaps it should not be a term of Christian communion; and if not, there appears no reason why it should be a term of ministerial. The covenants, thus engaged in, might find more to join in them than at present; and the exercise seems equally scriptural and edifying. Some of these alterations might be useful as remedies; at any rate, some alterations are necessary. Several persons, however, are averse to any change, and oppose every innovation.

QUERY 12. We inquire, finally, into the validity of the reasons urged against attempting to remedy the evils above complained of?

1. Some of us deny their existence. As matters in our Testimony they cannot be denied; but it is denied that they are evil. Some of us are yet of the same opinions as our reformers and the first Seceders, with respect to every thing in the Covenants: approve of civil ecclesiastical establishments,



ments, and are averse to the extension of full religious liberty to others. These are more consistent than the rest ; but they are consistent in favouring what is wrong. It is a grievance that such opinions should be yet among us. It is comfortable, if the majority be of different sentiments : and if so, conformity to the minority cannot be expected. At any rate, conformity is purchased too dearly, when at the price of truth and conscience. Let those who deny the evil of these things complained of, read for their conviction publications by some of ourselves on these subjects \* : let them inquire, Is not God Lord of the conscience ? and are we not to allow others the same liberty of worship which we wish for ourselves, —to treat others as we wish others to treat us ?

2. Some who confess that the grievances do exist, yet alledge them so trivial that they may be spared. Though this may not be the verbal expression, it is the language of conduct. But is it a trifle to admit any known evil to remain undisturbed ? Do we admit the doctrine of venial sins ? If we did so, Is it a trifle to approve what breathes the spirit of Antichrist ? Or to be insincere in our public professions of religion ? Trifling evils are not to be spared ; and if they were, these could not be ranked among them.

3. But say some, “ A more gentle remedy may be found.” Many of us are of this opinion ; and hence our endeavours to palliate these matters, by referring to the Seceders answers to a Mr Nairn, who denied that subjection to civil magistrates, if of a different religion, was lawful, and so separated from them on the subject of the magistrates power. These answers we use as our Explication and Commentary on such parts of the Forms as seem exceptionable. Unhappily here, the Com-  
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mentary is at war with the Text. The declaration in these Answers is not so much an explanation, as a contradiction of those parts in the Confession and Covenants. And even these answers are deficient on the point of religious liberty : tho' they were more perfect than perhaps any thing in their day.

Another similar palliation was lately proposed, by an overture containing some of the true principles of religious liberty ; and proposing, that these should be declared to the world as expressing the sense in which we *understand* the objectionable parts in the forms. It is, however, absolutely impossible for us, or any other, so to *understand* matters.

Thus to understand these points is to make opposites synonymous. This is as much as to say, that when we say *black*, we intend *white* ; when we speak of *darkness*, we are to be understood as speaking of *light*. It is saying, that when we, in the most solemn manner, profess the sentiments of *persecution*, we are giving an open avowal of the most unlimited *religious liberty*. The proposal, and treatment it met in Synod, rather displayed the existence and malignity of the evil, than afforded any relief. We wished to purge out the leaven, but could not ; because we *must not* grant that there is in the forms any thing wrong. Every thing must be capable of a sound sense ; and hence, though our declaration amount to a flat contradiction, yet we must call it an explanation, and use it as a vindication.

4. " But since there is no perfection, why should we struggle ? We have, it is true, in our public profession, some foibles, but perhaps it is impossible to attain to a more perfect exemption". It is true there is no perfection ; it is also true, perhaps, our foibles are fewer than those of any other sect : yet they are too numerous. And though our fathers, who did not advert to them, are not to be  
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so much condemned for admitting them, we who see them have no such excuse. Though we cannot expect to attain perfection; yet we are certainly to hate and oppose every false and every wicked way. Glaring evils call for opposition: and the very proposal of this excuse is suspicious: it would preclude for ever all reformation. Besides, in the prosecution of what is good, we may depend on the divine blessing to further our endeavours; but if we knowingly, and with consent, allow the continuance of evil, we are guilty.

5. "Our Church is not ripe for such an agitation. We cannot bear it; it is yet unseasonable." This is a suspicious excuse: all those who are too interested to desire, or too indolent to attempt public reform in Church or State, have this evasion always ready, "It is not yet seasonable." This may be true, and delay may be admitted in cases where sin and duty are not concerned. Where these are concerned, it can never have place. Whenever sin appears, it is seasonable to cease from it. After an evil is seen, avowedly to tolerate its continuance for a time, is so long to establish the practice by a law. While we wait for the season, let it be considered that inconsistency, duplicity, and prevarication, are continuing to stain our public profession; and while we spare these, from the consideration of the unseasonableness of change, we admit that sin is for the present seasonable. While we thus say, *A little sleep, a little slumber*, our destruction as a Church may come like a whirlwind. But why is this reform unseasonable?

6. "It would spoil the peace of congregations, by directing the minds of the people to abuses of which they were ignorant, or to which they were inattentive." The peace of congregations is a matter of great importance. The honour of religion, and the edification of Christians, are here

here much concerned. There is, however, a common mistake with respect to the people in this matter. Many of them are neither ignorant of abuses, nor inadvertent to them. Many would more cheerfully acquiesce in a change, than continue in the present state. But though this were not the case, Is peace to be purchased at the expence of truth and conscience? Is it to rest upon the foundation of the people's ignorance? Is this to be the mother of devotion? A peace on these terms seems too like a league with death, and a covenant with hell. Such a league will deceive all who trust in it. There is at this moment, perhaps, greater danger of dissention in congregations from the continuance of these abuses, than would be from any attempt to remove them. Many at present are remaining in communion, on the expectation of such an attempt. Many who have presented children to baptism, would not now repeat their profession. Such would cheerfully give their suffrage to a reform. Since this is the case, Whether is better, to risk the evil discord in the indulgence of sin, or to risk it in the prosecution of duty?

7. But "Would not the proposed scrutiny and alteration reflect dishonour on our venerable ancestors, and disgrace our Party." Inconsistency is an imperfection; but it is an imperfection inseparable from human nature in its present state. When we alledge that our ancestors were in some points wrong, we reproach them no more than by alledging that they were men fallible like ourselves: and if our veneration excludes this, it is too much of the Popish kind; and needs only a little establishment by continuance, and augmentation by prejudice, to place them on the level with the Saints of the Calendar. If ever our respect leads to favour their faults, it is idolatrous in its nature. Regard to the honour of a creature is thus set in opposition

position to our regard to the honour of God, and prevails against it.

Regard to the honour of our party, as far as it prevails in this matter, is of the same nature. This principle binds many in the world to prosecute folly, and continue abuse. A prince, after declaring war, will not seek peace, lest he should condemn his former arrogance. The duellist, after he has taken notice of an affront, will not overlook, but resent it at the risk of his life. A church will not review her forms, lest she should seem to confess, "Perhaps I have been mistaken." Thus abuse is bound on men by the cord of pride. They persist in evil, to avoid the imputation of,—What? of—Humanity. The attempt, however, is vain. Our aversion to acknowledge mistakes, will not prevent others from discovering, and effectually exposing them. Our numerous adversaries, though blind to their own inconsistency, have the eyes of an eagle to discover our faults, and the voice of a trumpet to proclaim them in the world. But though this were not the case, Is not this regard, as far as it has influence to prevent duty, a preference of the honour of party to the honour of God; a loving the praise of men above the praise of God; a fasting for strife and debate, and offering the *accursed* thing?

While we thus seek for honour, we are in danger of finding disgrace—the disgrace of sin. They who thus would exalt themselves, are in so far exalting themselves against God, and cannot prosper, but must be abased: while those who humble themselves before the Lord, in departing from their iniquity, are honourably employed, and will be exalted in due season.

8. "But would not an alteration in our Public Forms break our congregations, diminish our numbers, prevent our multiplication, and injure ministers

“ ministers with respect to their subsistence in the “ world ?” All these would be highly unpleasant, and are therefore to be deprecated. They are not however certain consequences. And if they were probable, a prospect of consequences is never to hinder the performance of duty clearly inculcated.

The breach of congregations is equally probable if the attempt be omitted, as if it be put in operation ; and if the breach of congregations is to be prevented by abuse alone, it is better it should occur. This, however, and the diminution of our numbers, there is little reason to fear. If it be supposed that many would desert the cause on account of the discovery of abuses ; these many must be supposed to desert, either because such abuses have existed, or because they are now abandoned. The former class would find no community where the same abuses do not exist in equal or greater degrees, or others of a still more serious nature. Our *own* abuses are not stated by the writer of these observations, because equal or greater, do not appear in other communions, but because they are our *own*. A similar examination would discover the abuses of other denominations, at least, equally numerous, equally malignant, and adhered to with equal obstinacy ; while others would appear of which we are comparatively clear.

The greatest desertion might be expected to the other class of Seceders ; and to that communion many of the above observations are equally applicable. In one respect, they are even more applicable. The bone of contention, the religious clause of the Burgess-oath, involves in its nature the spirit of Antichrist. It avows Religious Establishment by civil authority, and binds to the support of such establishment. The use of the Oath characterises it a “ Mark “ of the Beast, without which no person is permitted to buy or sell ;” — as if a person should not make



a coat, or a pair of shoes, or sell a pound of groceries, unless he be of the established religion. There is little danger then of desertion because the abuses *have existed*. And those who desert because abuses are *ejected*, do more good to the society by their absence than by their presence: they desert us on account of our apostacy from evil.

Our multiplication is probably not less retarded by our adherence to these abuses, than it would be by their ejection. But if this had been always the prevalent respect, our forefathers had never made Secession. The faithful have always been comparatively few. The strictness of true religion is always ungrateful to the many.

“ But it will endanger the salary of ministers, “ by weakening their congregations.” This consequence is doubtful; and the objection is so like that used against every reformation, that it scarcely ought to be named. “ The Reform might “ otherwise be eligible; but our Thrones, our Pre- “ rogatives, our Revenues; our Titles, our Pen- “ sions, our Places and Expectations, are in dan- “ ger; the Mitre, the Primacy, the Bishopric, “ Deanry, Vicarage, Curacy; the Kirk, the Manse, “ and Glebe, the Teinds, the Presentation, and “ Prospect; the Meeting-house, Stipends, and “ Collection, are all in *danger*: let all reformation “ be avoided, let it be execrated.” God forbid that such motives should influence our religious conduct.—He who loveth house or land more than me, says Christ, is not worthy of me.

In the above observations we have seen that serious evils do really exist among us; that these affect our religious conduct: the necessity of some attempt to remedy has been declared; some hints toward a radical cure have been offered; the objections most specious considered, and exposed: It is our duty to attempt purging out the old leaven, and thus doing good, trust consequences to the Lord.

THE END.

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